

EPA Approvals Review – Draft Report
Template for written comments

Your details

Please provide your name and your job title and organisation (if relevant), and indicate if your comments are confidential.

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Confidential:	Yes / No

Please send your comments to approvals.review@epa.vic.gov.au by Friday 7 December 2012.

Your comments

Please note – The text below is abridged. Please refer to the Draft Report for the full text of what is proposed (e.g. A.1 – A.4, not just A.).

A new risk-based assessment system (Chapter 4 of Draft Report)

A. EPA will use a risk-based selection tool to determine the level of assessment required for each development proposal.

We support a risk-based approach to be developed as proposed.

Streamlined and efficient (Chapter 5 of Draft Report)

B. EPA will consistently, confidently and efficiently apply exemptions where allowed under the EP Act. The exemption pathway will have a four week turn-around, from submission of a proposal to a response in writing from EPA notifying the applicant of the decision.

We support a 4 week decision proposal for exemption applications

C. EPA will introduce a new fast track works approval pathway for low-risk proposals.

We support the proposal to introduce a fast track pathway for low risk proposals

D. EPA will reduce pre-application timeframes for standard works approvals and RD&D approvals.

We support reduced pre-application timeframes however feel that D.1 page 54 should also include a maximum period for EPA to provide an assessment plan to an applicant. We feel no longer than 2 weeks for this process would be acceptable.

E. In response to an excessive number of section 30A emergency approval applications related to increased variability in rainfall patterns, EPA proposes to amend certain licences – relating to sewage treatment (A03) and extractive industry and mining (C01) scheduled premises – to allow discharges under restricted conditions, and to require these discharges to be reported in the licensee’s annual performance statement (APS). Emergency approvals will still be required outside of the restricted conditions, including for major upset conditions and unforeseen events.

While this section has covered “section 30A emergency approvals”, we feel that it should be broadened to also include applications for “section 30A commissioning, repair or decommissioning”. We seek this change because we feel the due process needs to be clearly outlined for both EPA assessors and applicants alike. The timeframe for EPA to notify in writing applicants of its decision should also included. Where the Authority denotes in an approved section 30A that it will permit certain discharges under restricted conditions relevant to the applicants licence, and that the industry will need to report these discharges in their APS, the approved section 30A should explicitly state if any declaration in the APS compliance statement of such events would or would not contravene the licence.

F. EPA will seek to improve the coordination of approvals by working with other agencies.

We support this proposal.

Effective at protecting the environment (Chapter 6)

G. EPA will become more effective at protecting and enhancing the environment.

We support proposal to be more effective at protecting and enhancing the environmental especially by

- 1) Improving guidance materials as outlined in G.2
- 2) Improving EPA's expertise, especially identifying, appointing and retaining experts in the various categories to support both EPA staff and external stakeholders

H. EPA will introduce a systematic process to periodically review standard conditions and EPA licences.

We support a systematic process to periodically review both EPA licences and standard conditions of licenses on a frequency of no greater than a 5 years. Undertaking reviews on a more frequent basis would pose unnecessary work load, both on EPA officers and industry for little gain as changes in knowledge on environmental impacts takes time and should be able to be foreseen on this basis.

Should changes to licenses be necessary as a result of a W/A etc before a review was due, then a broader licences review could be undertaken.

I. EPA will work with business, community and government stakeholders to develop an alternative program to allow for recognition of excellence in environmental performance across all EPA licensed sites.

Firstly Alcoa feels the current Accredited Licence process is effective. However, we understand that many changes have occurred recently bringing all EPA licenses closer to the Accredited Licence format and benefits and therefore understand EPA's proposal to work with stakeholders in looking for alternative approaches. Alcoa looks forward to continuing to work with the Authority, providing comment and participate in forums in looking at alternatives that encourages and rewards good environmental performance.

Transparent, consistent and accountable (chapter 7)

J. EPA will increase the transparency and accountability of its approvals system.

We support a transparent and accountable approvals system.

Inclusive and Accessible (chapter 8)

K. EPA will seek opportunities for improved interaction between the community and industry.

We support EPA's proposal for both community engagement and also for applicant engagement through pre-application meetings for standard works approvals. We feel that pre-application meeting can be extended to all applications to ensure EPA and applicants understand the proposal and requirements involved.

Further comments and suggestions

Alcoa thanks the Authority for the opportunity to provide feedback on proposals in this review.